

indecision that characterized the efforts of some health authorities was largely due to lack of funds and the obstructive tactics of those who now would shift the blame and responsibility to the shoulders of the devoted Doctors.

The important practical question is to remedy defects and prepare to deal more effectively with the next epidemic, or the recurrence of the last epidemic. No one can predict with safety how long the comparative freedom we are now enjoying from the influenza will last. Anyone who has practical measures to suggest should get them into practical shape. Every householder and every resident in every community of California is interested in our common health problems, and the Journal will welcome constructive suggestions from any citizen or organization.

True science never becomes discouraged or baffled or bewildered in the presence of an unsolved problem. Each unsolved problem that challenges medical science only quickens the interest and increases the efforts of our whole profession for its solution.

#### PAYMENT OF STATE TAX.

In 1918 an act passed the Legislature assessing an annual tax of two dollars against each registered physician in California. In case of non-payment by March 1, the license of the offender would be subject to revocation and he could only be reinstated by paying a fee of ten dollars. This tax money is to be employed in the prosecution of illegal practitioners and similar work necessary to protect licensed physicians. On the whole, the tax is a good thing and provides an urgently needed fund for very necessary work.

Some unintentional injustice has been done certain physicians in military service who could not, or did not, receive notice and who consequently now find themselves under the necessity of paying ten dollars or of practicing illegally. Other physicians, a very few, have received due notice and refused payment. They will be dealt with under the law and have only themselves to thank for their own predicament. Altogether there have been very few complaints. None of these have merit except in the case cited, of physicians in service who did not receive notice. Here is to be considered the evident fact that these physicians have been more fortunate than their fellows. They have made sacrifices, to be sure. But the fact remains that they are fortunate and enviable to have been in the military. Among the necessary sacrifices they may reckon this tax penalty. It is, after all, a small amount and will not seriously inconvenience any who must pay it. On reflection, none of these men will be able to view it in any other light.

It is said, with some truth, that the burden of regulation of the medical profession should rest on the social body of the State, inasmuch as this regulation is solely for the protectional benefit of the people. But it must be remembered also, that legislature and people alike look to the medical profession for expert counsel and guidance in matters pertaining to health. They have a right

to expect skilled leadership in this field. Not to disappoint this expectation means that the medical profession must go ahead of its obvious duty. It must pioneer. If it does not maintain this sanitary and health leadership for which it is fitted and which is demanded of it by the public, *it may as well quit and it will soon be forced to quit.* It is a small matter to contribute a very small amount to a special fund for the protection of the public in a way that only the medical profession can protect it. We will pay the tax, rejoice in the privilege of having served our country in uniform, and make every effort to administer wisely community leadership in matters of health.

#### PUBLIC HEALTH AND STREET RAILWAYS.

It would seem that the price of a street car ride was a matter of economics only, but such is not the case. Throughout the United States there is a movement to advance street car fares, usually not over a cent or two. It is said, with some reason, that the increase is too small to be a serious economic burden to the public. It is said, with much less reason, that increased cost of operation justifies and necessitates the raise.

In the first place, it must be shown that increased cost of operation could not be met by economical administration and by other means than increase of fares. In the second place, street railways are a public utility, a necessity of modern life and essential for industry, business, and health. They are essential for health because they are the *sine qua non* for decentralization of towns and cities. Suburban extensions, rural homes for workmen and decent home districts for workers in cities are made possible by street railways. Whatever, therefore, interferes with the maximum service of the street railways to the workers, to that extent tends to crowd the workers and their families into whatever living quarters can be secured close to the industry. This means tenements congested, poor living quarters, and all the evils dependent on faulty housing which, it had been hoped, were in permanent decrease in this country. Anything, therefore, which decreases the present healthy tendency to suburban living and decent housing away from industry, for the working class, is a menace to public health, an economic and social danger, and represents a powerful reactionary influence.

Is the movement to increase street railway fares subject to this indictment? According to John P. Fox<sup>1</sup>, it is. He states that nearly always higher fares decrease short trip passengers to such an extent that the receipts are the same as or even less than, before the change. For instance, in Columbus, Ohio, during the first two months of higher fares, the receipts were 16½ per cent. lower than the preceding year and the total passengers were 35½ per cent. less. Moreover, the public has not benefited by higher fares, as the belief that the revenues could be indefinitely increased by this simple means has led to widespread neglect of economical administration and proper upkeep on the part of electric railway lines.

<sup>1</sup> Survey, March 1, 1919.